

Historic Resources Technical Report
20 North Almaden Avenue
San José, California

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

David J. Powers & Associates has requested an historic resources evaluation of the building located at 20 North Almaden Avenue, San José, California. The building would be removed as part of a proposed mixed-use development at 45 North San Pedro Street. This report describes the building, discusses its history, and evaluates it for potential listing on National, State, and local registers.

20 North Almaden Avenue was constructed as a warehouse addition to the Farmers' Union hardware store in late 1945 or 1946 (Wyckoff 1945). While it is associated with the Farmer's Union complex (151, 161, and 169-177 West Santa Clara Avenue), made up of three San José City Landmarks, 20 North Almaden Avenue was constructed after their period of significance, was built in a different material, and is architecturally undistinguished. As such, the building does not appear to be eligible for listing on NRHP or CRHR. 20 North Almaden Avenue received a score of 30.1 on the City of San José Historic Evaluation Sheet, suggesting that it is ineligible for consideration as a City Landmark.

RESEARCH METHODS

The building was evaluated through a site visit to the project property that included internal and external inspection of the structure and surveillance of the immediate area for historic features relevant to the structure's history. Fieldwork was supplemented with archival research at the California Room of the San José Public Library, the History San José Archives, and the Bancroft and Earth Sciences Libraries at the University of California, Berkeley. Sources consulted included city directories, Sanborn fire insurance maps, archival documents, and works on the history of San José. In addition, property owner Tom McEnery, the former mayor of San José, was informally interviewed about his family's history at the property.

PROPERTY DESCRIPTION

Setting

20 North Almaden Avenue was originally constructed in late 1945 or early 1946 as a warehouse building for the Farmer's Union hardware store (Wyckoff 1945).¹ The structure is a rectangular, one-story building with three reinforced concrete walls and one brick wall, and is currently occupied by three restaurants and a law office. The building is set back 30' east from the line of North Almaden Avenue. To the north is the parking lot at 45 North San Pedro Street, to the south is an open courtyard behind 151-161 West Santa Clara Street, and to the east is a courtyard behind 29 North San Pedro Street. The buildings to the east and south belong to the Farmers' Union complex (see Figures 1-2).

¹ The date of construction is inferred from the architectural plan, which is a second revision dated October 1945 (Wyckoff 1945).

The building is 125'x40' in plan and is 21' high at the peak of the roofline. The east, west, and north walls are in reinforced concrete while the south wall is in brick, reflecting the building's original identity as an addition to an earlier warehouse building, since demolished.

Exterior

The west façade has a stepped gable in plain concrete, with a slightly projecting rectangular concrete cornice and dentils. A central pillar partitions the west façade into two openings that serve as entrances to Los Cubanos Restaurant and San Pedro Bistro and Wine. A cloth awning 6' deep runs the length of the façade. As part of a remodeling for retail use in 1960, the west façade was opened to North Almaden Avenue via two glass doors in aluminum sash set in plate glass windows canted inward from the street. At this time, the projecting concrete bays over the two new entrances were added, along with the stepped roofline visible today (Figure 3).

The east façade has a stepped gable in plain concrete, currently covered largely in ivy. A glass door set in the center of the façade provides entry to a suite of law offices. A cloth awning sits over the door. The east façade faces a patio with a metal trellis and brick landscaping detail (Figure 4).

The north façade is unfinished concrete divided into bays by the attachment of wooden planks. Three openings with awnings, corresponding to the locations of steel rolling doors on the 1945 plans, provide entryways to the Satori tea bar and Los Cubanos Cuban Restaurant. These openings are plate glass doors in aluminum sash (Figures 5 and 6).

The south façade was originally the north wall of the first pipe and hardware warehouse of the Farmer's Union complex, constructed between 1884 and 1891 and demolished after 1962. A concrete cornice was added on top of the brick when 20 North Almaden Avenue was constructed, raising the height of the wall by approximately 2'. The south façade has two arched openings approximately 10' wide, which originally served as warehouse doors. These openings have been re-framed with rectangular concrete members that now hold plate glass doors and appurtenant aluminum sash (Figure 7).

The roof, which rises to 21' high at its peak, is symmetrically pitched and composed of wooden boards on light steel trusses, covered in asphalt roof panels.

Interior

The original structure was built on an open plan. The interior of the building was subdivided in 1960 into three spaces and in the later 1960s into four. The western half of the building is currently divided symmetrically into two restaurant spaces that front on North Almaden Avenue. These spaces feature 12'6" drop ceilings and tile floors, with rear areas partitioned to provide space for kitchens and restrooms (Figure 8). The eastern, rear part of the building is irregularly divided into a retail space (currently occupied by a tea shop) that opens north onto the parking lot, and a law office with a reception area and two office rooms, which opens onto the east façade patio via a plate glass door in aluminum sash. In both rear spaces the ceiling is open to the full height of the roof, with steel trusses and wooden roof boards visible (Figure 9). The roof trusses are attached to concrete pillars on the north, east, and west walls, while along the south wall the roof trusses are supported by vertical steel members bolted to the brick.

See Figures 7-9 for illustrations of the building as of November, 2014. Figures 10-11 are architectural drawings illustrating the original plan of the building and the 1960 renovations.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The first historic residents of the project area were Claudio Alvarez (or Albiros) and his family, who were among the founding settlers of the pueblo of San José in 1777. Alvarez received a town lot (*solar*) in Moraga's division of land in the San José pueblo in 1783; his grandson, Juan Bautista Alvarez, left a 200 square vara parcel including 20 North Almaden Street to his wife Cecilia Martinez on his death in 1857 (Bancroft I:477; II:134; Albiros 1857). Purchased by local merchant and early Anglo settler Peter Davidson by 1861, the land including 20 North Almaden was sold to George Crane in 1861 and passed into the hands of the Wallace family by 1866 (Davidson 1861; Pieper 1868).

The 20 North Almaden parcel apparently became part of the Farmers' Union complex by 1891. The Farmers Union Corporation was established in 1874 and served as an agricultural cooperative and bank, selling groceries, produce, hardware and agricultural equipment. Control of the corporation was consolidated in the early 1900s by John P. McEnery and Robert F. Benson. The Farmers' Union served as an agricultural cooperative and bank, selling groceries, produce, hardware and agricultural equipment; during the Great Depression the focus of the business shifted to light and heavy hardware sales. After 1960, mercantile operations ceased and the Farmer's Union complex shifted its focus to restaurant and office uses (Laffey 1997). Originally located on the northwest corner of West Santa Clara and North San Pedro (151 West Santa Clara), the Farmers' Union expanded to acquire 23-25 North San Pedro as a feed mill in the 1880s, then 161 and 169-177 West Santa Clara by 1940 and 1955 respectively.

The 1891 Sanborn map shows the property as an open yard behind the Farmers' Union feed mill (23-25 North San Pedro Street), enclosed by a fence on the north and west and the Farmers' Union hardware warehouse to the south. The 1891 and 1915 Sanborn maps show that part of the 20 North Almaden parcel was used for pipe and wire storage, presumably associated with the adjacent Farmers' Union buildings.

A two-story brick building approximately 50' square was located at the western end of the parcel, abutting the College of Notre Dame lecture hall (Sanborn 1891, 1915). Sanborn maps from 1936 and 1939 show this story brick structure as containing sulphur and chemical storage on the first floor and a sheet metal works on the second floor. Most of the 20 North Almaden lot remained an open yard, though two wood frame storage buildings were located on the western and southern end of the parcel (Sanborn 1936, 1939).

Almaden Avenue was extended north of Santa Clara Street in the early 1940s. When the current structure at 20 North Almaden Avenue was constructed in 1945 or 1946, the architectural plans describe it as a warehouse building (Figure 10). It adjoined (and shared a wall with) the brick building to the south, which served as the Farmers' Union hardware store (Figure 10; Wyckoff 1945). In 1960 it was converted for use as a hardware and tool shop; in the later 1960s it was further subdivided into three restaurant and one office spaces, an arrangement that persists today (Figure 11; Wuss 1960; McEnery 2014).

FRAMEWORK FOR EVALUATION

Under CEQA, local agencies must consider whether projects will cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of a historical resource, which is considered to be a significant effect on the environment (CEQA §21084.1). A ‘historical resource’ is a resource determined eligible for NRHP, CRHR, or local registers by a lead agency (CEQA §15064.5), while a “substantial adverse change” can include physical demolition, destruction, relocation, or alteration of the resource or its immediate surroundings” that impairs the significance of an historical resource in such a way as to impair its eligibility for Federal, State, or local registers. In most cases, whenever a project adversely impacts historic resources, a mitigated Negative Declaration or EIR is required under CEQA §15064.

The National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) consists of properties that meet one of four significance criteria:

- A. Association with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history;
- B. Association with the lives of persons significant in our past;
- C. Embodiment of the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, represents the work of a master, possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D. Has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important to prehistory or history.

A property that meets one or more of these significance criteria must also possess sufficient integrity to convey that significance. Seven aspects of integrity are used in National Register evaluations: location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. Integrity is based on a property’s significance within a specific historic context, and can only be evaluated after its significance has been established (National Park Service 1997).

The California Register of Historic Resources (CRHR) is broadly similar to the Federal process, though evaluation should primarily consider the significance of the property in State and local contexts. The CRHR also uses four criteria, namely:

- 1) association with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of local or regional history, or the cultural heritage of California or the United States; or
- 2) association with the lives of persons important to local, California, or national history; or
- 3) embodiment of the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values; or
- 4) potential to yield, information important to prehistory or history of the local area, California, or the nation.

Resources determined eligible for the NRHP are automatically listed on the CRHR. In addition, historic landmark designations by cities and counties are also presumptively eligible for CRHR (California Office of Historic Preservation 2001).

The City of San José maintains a register of City Landmarks, Historic Districts, and Structures of Merit. The City of San José’s Historic Preservation Ordinance (Chapter 13.48 of the Municipal Code) defines a resource as a City Landmark if it has “special historical, architectural, cultural,

aesthetic or engineering interest or value of an historical nature” and falls into one of the following categories of structure:

1. An individual structure or portion thereof;
2. An integrated group of structures on a single lot;
3. A site, or portion thereof; or
4. Any combination thereof. (Sec. 13.48.020.C)

Under the ordinance, landmark status can be granted if the structure is identified with “persons, eras or events that have contributed to local, regional, state or national history, heritage or culture in a distinctive, significant or important way”; consists of “a distinctive, significant or important work or vestige” of an architectural style, master architect, is likely to yield valuable historical information, or uses unusual or significant materials or engineering methods. The ordinance also defines historic districts as: “a geographically definable area of urban or rural character, possessing a significant concentration or continuity of site, building, structures or objects unified by past events or aesthetically by plan or physical development.” (Sec.13.48.020.B).

Evaluation of potential City Landmarks is conducted based on both the subjective criteria above and on a numerical tally system that rates structures based on visual quality or design; history and association; environment and context; integrity; reversibility; interior quality and conditions; and NRHP/CRHR status. A points-based rating system is used; scores over 33 suggest that the building should be evaluated for City Landmark status or the CRHR.

SIGNIFICANCE EVALUATION

Originally constructed in late 1945 or 1946 as a warehouse addition to the Farmer’s Union hardware store, 20 North Almaden Avenue was not originally a freestanding structure. Its reinforced concrete construction, unfinished concrete exteriors, and stepped concrete gable present an undistinguished example of mid-20th century commercial architecture in San José. Its brick south wall was originally the exterior wall of the first Farmer’s Union hardware warehouse, constructed between 1884 and 1891 and demolished in the 1960s; the internal partitions and openings to retail spaces on the west façade were added after 1960. However, the building was designed by Ralph Wyckoff, who also designed two San José City Landmarks, the San José National Bank (1942), 101 West Santa Clara Street, and the St. James’ Square Post Office (1933).

While it is associated with the three San José City Landmark buildings that make up the Farmer’s Union complex, 20 North Almaden Avenue contrasts with them in style and period. The Farmer’s Union building (151 West Santa Clara) is a brick Spanish Eclectic style structure constructed in 1877 and remodeled in 1930. The Masson/LeFranc building (161 West Santa Clara) is a brick Art Deco building constructed in 1883 and remodeled in 1930, while the Lyndon Building (177 West Santa Clara), also in brick, was constructed circa 1883. The Farmer’s Union building has a period of primary significance from 1918-1945 and the Masson/LeFranc and Lyndon Buildings from 1870-1918 (City of San José 2014).

Likewise, the building has no connection to individuals or businesses that occupied the neighboring buildings and contribute to the significance of the area, such as Charles LeFranc and Paul Masson (vintners), Theodore Lenzen (architect), or the San José *Mercury* (newspaper). It is

indirectly associated with John P. McEnery and Robert F. Benson, owners of the Farmer's Union, but dates from after their main period of activity in San José. As such, the building should be considered only loosely connected with an organization of primary importance to the history of San José.

The building generally retains integrity in location, design, setting, and association. However, internal partitions to the building and exterior alterations to add doors, windows, awnings, and decorative planking have moderately impacted the quality of materials, as has the addition of modern plate glass windows in aluminum strip sash and a two-foot high concrete cornice to the brick south wall, the oldest part of the structure. The conversion of the structure first to retail and then to office and restaurant use, moreover, has seriously impacted the integrity of feeling.

20 North Almaden Avenue scored 30.1 on the City of San José historic evaluation tally, and therefore does not appear to be eligible for the City's Historic Resources Inventory. The building also appears to be ineligible for NRHP or CRHR because it does not meet Criteria 1/A (relationship to events or trends in local, state, or national history), 2/B (persons of significance known to be associated with the property), 3/C (work of a master, high artistic value, example of a particular type of construction), or 4/D (information that is significant to history or prehistory).

FIGURES



Figure 1: Location Map (2012 USGS San José 7.5' Quad)



Figure 2: Project Area (imagery: Google Earth).



Figure 3: West facade, showing openings added in 1960.



Figure 4: East facade, showing door to law office.



Figure 5: North and west facades.

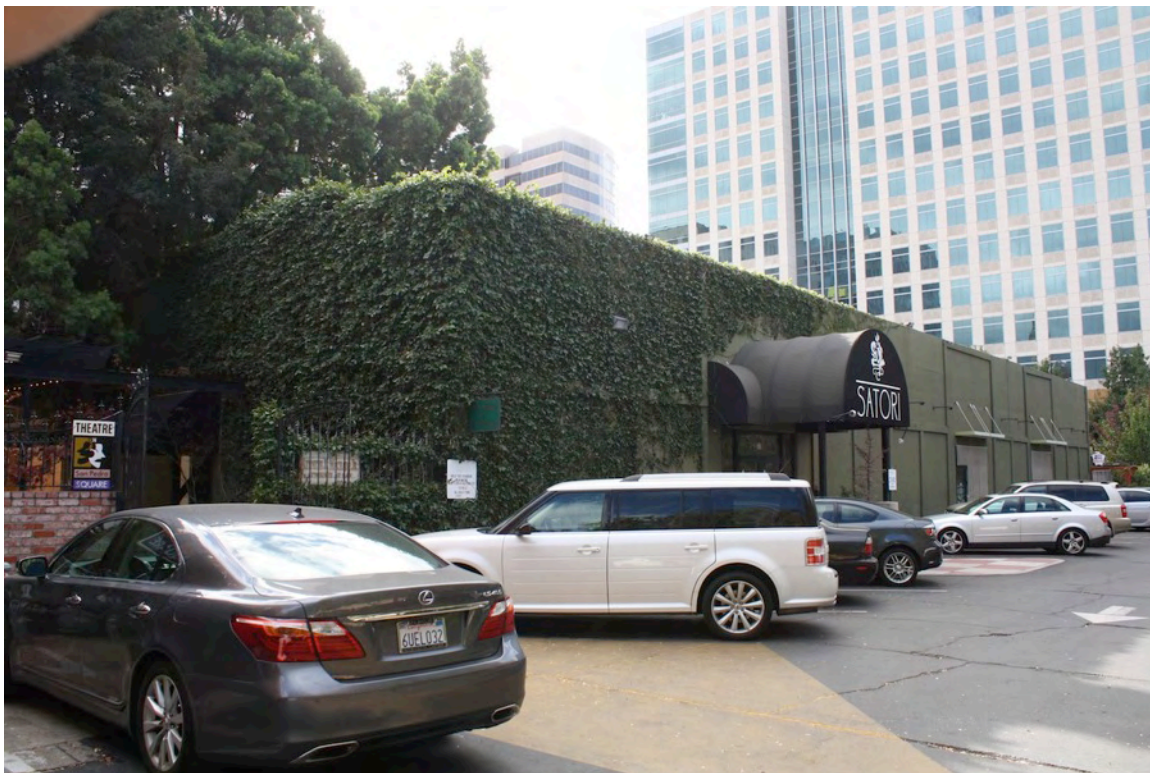


Figure 6: North and east facades. Note that original warehouse roll doors have been converted to two windows and a plate glass door.



Figure 7: South facade detail showing 1880s brick wall. Note concrete framing and sash installed in original warehouse doors and concrete cornice, both added after 1960.



Figure 8: Interior of restaurant. Note drop ceiling added in 1960.



Figure 9: Interior of tea shop in eastern half of building. Note exposed steel trusses and wood plank roof.

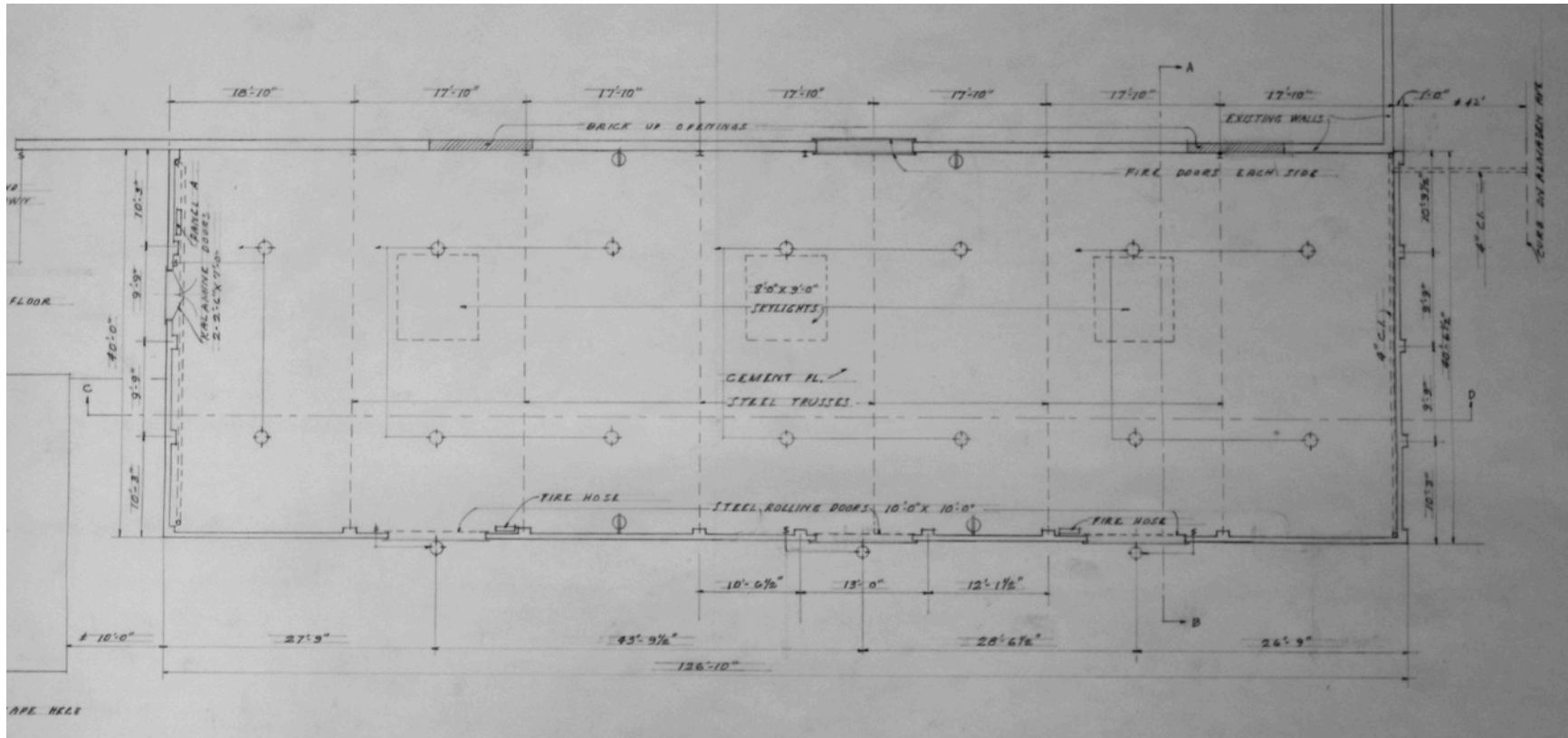


Figure 10: Floor plan for new Farmers' Union warehouse building, Ralph Wyckoff, Architect, October 8, 1945.

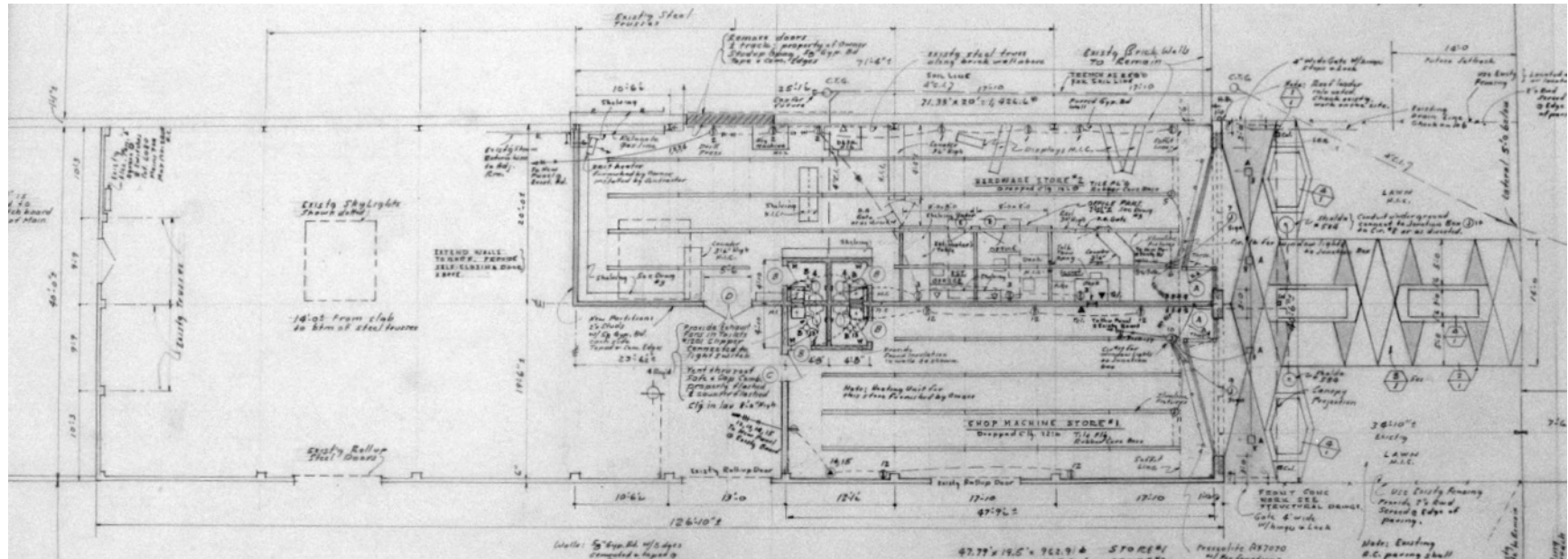


Figure 11: Floor plan showing 1960s renovations, Peter Wuss, Architect, December 29, 1960. Note addition of internal partitions and openings in the west facade.

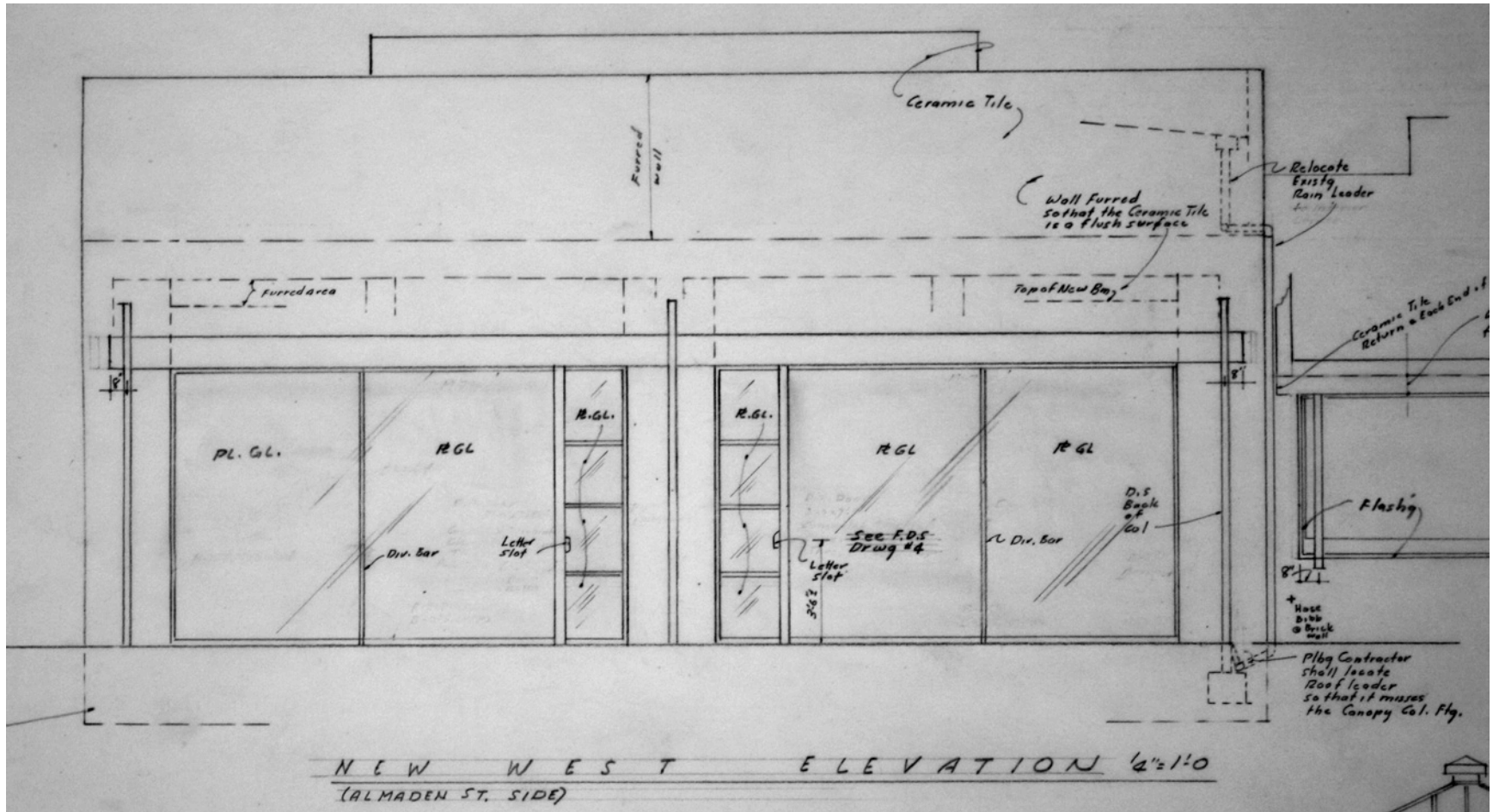


Figure 12: New west elevation, Peter Wuss, architect, December 29, 1960

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1884 Sheet 11.

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1915 Volume 1, Sheet 85.

1915 (rev.1931) Volume 1, Sheet 85.

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1915 (rev.1939) Volume 1, Sheet 85.

1915 (rev.1950) Volume 1, Sheet 85.
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Wuss, Peter G.

1960 Alterations of Building for Farmers' Union, 151 West Santa Clara Street, San José, California." December 29, 1960. Architectural drawing on file, History San José.

Wyckoff, Ralph

1945 "Warehouse Building for the Farmers' Union, 151 West Santa Clara Street, San José, California." October 8, 1945. Architectural drawing on file, History San José.

APPENDIX A: SAN JOSÉ HISTORIC EVALUATION SHEET

HISTORIC EVALUATION SHEET

Historic Resource Name: 20 N Almaden Avenue (Farmer's Union Warehouse)

Note: Complete all blanks. Use spaces to justify ratings. For example, a rating of "E" on No. 9, Age, would be justified by "Built in 1850".

A. VISUAL QUALITY/DESIGN

- | | | | | | |
|----|---|---|-----------|---|-----------|
| 1. | EXTERIOR <u>Unfinished Concrete</u> | E | VG | G | <u>FP</u> |
| 2. | STYLE _____ | E | VG | G | <u>FP</u> |
| 3. | DESIGNER <u>Ralph Wyckoff</u> | E | <u>VG</u> | G | FP |
| 4. | CONSTRUCTION <u>Reinforced Concrete</u> | E | VG | G | <u>FP</u> |
| 5. | SUPPORTIVE ELEMENTS _____ | E | VG | G | <u>FP</u> |

B. HISTORY/ASSOCIATION

- | | | | | | |
|----|---|---|-----------|----------|-----------|
| 6. | PERSON/ORGANIZATION <u>Farmer's Union</u> | E | <u>VG</u> | G | FP |
| 7. | EVENT _____ | E | VG | G | <u>FP</u> |
| 8. | PATTERNS _____ | E | VG | <u>G</u> | FP |
| 9. | AGE <u>Built late 1945 or early 1946</u> | E | VG | G | <u>FP</u> |

C. ENVIRONMENTAL/CONTEXT

- | | | | | | |
|-----|---|---|----|----------|-----------|
| 10. | CONTINUITY <u>Compatible with character of Farmer's Union</u> | E | VG | <u>G</u> | FP |
| 11. | SETTING <u>Compatible with dominant character</u> | E | VG | <u>G</u> | FP |
| 12. | FAMILIARITY <u>Not familiar</u> | E | VG | G | <u>FP</u> |

D. INTEGRITY

- | | | | | | |
|-----|--|----------|----|----------|----|
| 13. | CONDITION <u>No apparent surface wear</u> | <u>E</u> | VG | G | FP |
| 14. | EXTERIOR ALTERATIONS <u>Maj. alterations 1960s</u> | E | VG | <u>G</u> | FP |
| 15. | STRUCTURAL REMOVALS <u>None</u> | <u>E</u> | VG | G | FP |
| 16. | SITE <u>Has not been moved</u> | <u>E</u> | VG | G | FP |

E. REVERSIBILITY

- | | | | | | |
|-----|----------------------------|---|-----------|---|----|
| 17. | EXTERIOR <u>Reversible</u> | E | <u>VG</u> | G | FP |
|-----|----------------------------|---|-----------|---|----|

REVIEWED BY: _____

DATE: _____

EVALUATION TALLY SHEET (Part I)

		<u>VALUE</u>			
A.	<u>VISUAL QUALITY/DESIGN</u>	<u>E</u>	<u>VG</u>	<u>G</u>	<u>FP</u>
1.	EXTERIOR	16	12	6	0
2.	STYLE	10	8	4	0
3.	DESIGNER	6	4	2	0
4.	CONSTRUCTION	10	8	4	0
5.	SUPPORTIVE ELEMENTS	8	6	3	0
<u>SUBTOTAL:</u>					<u>4</u>
B.	<u>HISTORY/ASSOCIATION</u>	<u>E</u>	<u>VG</u>	<u>G</u>	<u>FP</u>
6.	PERSON/ORGANIZATION	20	15	7	0
7.	EVENT	20	15	7	0
8.	PATTERNS	12	9	5	0
9.	AGE	8	6	3	0
<u>SUBTOTAL:</u>					<u>20</u>
C.	<u>ENVIRONMENTAL/CONTEXT</u>	<u>E</u>	<u>VG</u>	<u>G</u>	<u>FP</u>
10.	CONTINUITY	8	6	3	0
11.	SETTING	6	4	2	0
12.	FAMILIARITY	10	8	4	0
<u>SUBTOTAL:</u>					<u>5</u>
<u>"A" & "C" SUBTOTAL:</u>					<u>9</u>
<u>"B" SUBTOTAL:</u>					<u>20</u>
<u>TOTAL:</u>					<u>29</u>
(Sum of A,B & C)					

D. INTEGRITY

ADJUSTED SUBTOTAL: 29 - 1.9 = 27.1
(Preliminary Total minus Integrity Deductions)

E. REVERSIBILITY

FORM 58-118/HISTORICREPORTS.Cpm65 REV. 3/23/2007